

AIRSCOOP

By Colin E. Babb



CENTENNIAL KICKS OFF WITH PARADE OF FLIGHT

Thousands of visitors participated in the first major official event marking the beginning of the Centennial of Naval Aviation celebration, including an open house (above) and parade of flight at NAS North Island, Calif., on 12 February 2011. In addition to more than 75 historic and modern aircraft on the ground, attendees were treated to a massive flyover of 189 aircraft that took three hours to complete from start to finish. (Photo by MCCS Dave Nagle)

X-47B FLIES FOR FIRST TIME

The X-47B unmanned combat air system demonstrator



(below left) completed its first test flight at Edwards Air Force Base, Calif., on 4 February 2011. The 29-minute flight took the aircraft to an altitude of 5,000 feet before it returned safely. (Photo by Northrop Grumman)

EMALS CONDUCTS FIRST ELECTROMAGNETIC LAUNCH



An F/A-18E Super Hornet lifts off the runway after the first launch by EMALS.
(Photo by Kelly Schindler)

The Navy's Electromagnetic Aircraft Launch System (EMALS) successfully launched an F/A-18E Super Hornet at the Naval Air Systems Command's Lakehurst, N.J., facility on 18 February 2010. The launch was the first by the



HMS Ark Royal arrives in Portsmouth for the final time on 3 December 2010, ending 25 years of service. The voyage also included the final flight of the GR9 Harrier, the Royal Navy's only fixed-wing carrier aircraft. Ark Royal was decommissioned in March 2011.
(Photo by Royal Navy)

new system, which uses pulses of electromagnetic energy rather than steam, as used on the catapult systems currently in place on all U.S. aircraft carriers. EMALS will be installed on *Gerald R. Ford* (CVN 78) and all subsequent carriers.

HMS *ARK ROYAL* AND THE HARRIER SAY GOODBYE

On 11 March 2011, HMS *Ark Royal* was decommissioned at a ceremony in Portsmouth, United Kingdom. The move leaves the Royal Navy with two carriers—*Ark Royal*'s sister ship, HMS *Illustrious*, and the amphibious ship HMS *Ocean*. Because of the retirement of the last GR9 Harrier in December 2010, however, both of these ships will operate only helicopters until the acquisition of the F-35 later this decade. Both *Ark Royal*'s decommissioning and the Harrier's retirement were the result of cost-cutting recommendations by a Ministry of Defence Strategic Defence and Security Review.

HARVEST HAWK MAKES COMBAT DEBUT

The Marine Corps' new sensor/weapon kit for their KC-130J aircraft, dubbed "Harvest Hawk," deployed for the first time with VMGR-352 to Afghanistan in October 2010. The system saw its first combat several weeks later on 4 November. Harvest Hawk—which consists of an infrared and television camera unit mounted on the wing, a fire-control console, and Hellfire and Griffin missiles—allows KC-130Js to take on overwatch missions to provide persistent ground support for Marines.

MARINE CORPS ANNOUNCES F-35B BASING LOCATIONS

The Marine Corps announced plans for basing the service's 400 F-35B Joint Strike Fighters in two final environmental impact statements outlining locations for East and West Coast squadrons released by the Department of the Navy on 9 December 2010. Six operational squadrons (96 aircraft) will be based at MCAS Miramar, Calif.; five operational squadrons and one test squadron (88 aircraft) will be based at MCAS Yuma, Ariz.; three operational squadrons at two fleet replacement squadrons (88 aircraft) will be based at MCAS Beaufort, S.C.; and eight operational squadrons (128 aircraft) will be based at MCAS Cherry Point, N.C. The Navy also has initiated studies for basing its F-35C squadrons, with decisions expected by 2013.



A KC-130J with VMGR-352 fires a Hellfire missile during a mission in Afghanistan. The Harvest Hawk system saw its combat debut on 4 November 2010, while supporting 3rd Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment near the town of Sangin. (Photo by Marine Corps)